

The Phoenix Must Burn

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Summary: An AU based after Ragnarok. In which Crane refuses to let Abbie sacrifice herself again and The Mills sisters go Witness hunting.

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****Don't get me wrong. I love Crane. But This plotbunny refused to be put down humanely. ****

****As usual I own nothing. ****

****And there are spoilers. ****

****...****

Back in 1763 Crane had a Brother.

It took her a few weeks of research, sustained by coffee, screaming as the things she threw at the walls, and crying on Jenny's shoulder to discover this.

She was surprised she didn't already know about it, considering how often Crane used to wax poetic about his past.

But there is was, sitting innocently on her laptop screen on a bright Saturday morning. The name stood out in innocent Arial font: Ahitub Henry Crane b. 12 October 1747.

Ichabod's older Brother, Ahitub (what in seven hells was wrong with this family?) lived an uneventful life. He was married at 18, took over the management of their father's estate, had three children, and died all before Ichabod reached the age of 7.

The age gap could explain why Ichabod didn't really talk about his brother. Younger siblings could be difficult to relate to without a natural ravine of time running through your relationship.

Right now she was feeling it.

"Look, Abs, I know you're in a hurry to find the Pheonix Crane 2.0. But a lady's got needs!"

"Make it quick."

"Yeah. I'm just gonna grab some snacks too."

"Jenny!"

Too late, Jenny leapt out of the car and out of reach, loping her way into the gas station and leaving Abbie alone with her thoughts.

She wasn't used to Crane being gone again so soon. It was like being back in the catacombs again. Her head was filled with "Leftenant this" and "Leftenant that." Her inner monologue had redeveloped an archaic British accent and was using words she didn't even understand.

Not that she minded.

It distracted her from the memories, from the feeling of his stupid long arms pushing her out of the way, from the look in his scared eyes that had already seen death once, and the creaking of Pandora's box when his hand turned to mist and evaporated through her fingers.

The car door creaked open.

"I didn't know what you wanted so I just got you something that looked healthy," said Jenny, tossing a bag of beef jerky into her lap and putting a hot coffee into her cup holder.

Abbie raised her eyebrows. "Healthy?"

Jenny shrugged, resuming her seatbelt and tearing open a bag of chips. "Compared with most of the stuff in there, yeah. Let's hit the road. You wanna find Ahitub Jr. right?"

"You're not gonna let that go, are you?"

"I'm surprised Crane got away with something as good as Ichabod. Their parents must really have hated them. It makes Dad look like Atticus Finch."

The Mills sisters were alone again and coping. In general this meant distracting themselves with work, teasing each other with sarcastic quips, and avoiding talking about feelings in general.

Feelings were reserved for the wee hours of the morning, and stopping the truck by the side of the road when it was raining to hold Jenny because she started to cry and the rest of the world could just keep on moving they were staying right here thank you very much.

They didn't really use words during those times.

Abbie started up the car and pulled out into the lonely stretch of road, continuing north.

Her father's cryptic message about Crane's bloodline, along with Grace Dixon's letter written in 1789 had been enough to convince her that Corbin had been talking sense.

There was another Witness out there, descended from Ahitub's only remaining kid. A search through the FBI files and she'd come up with a few probable names.

Jenny was already outside with her truck before Abbie had finished packing her bag like it had never been a question that she had been coming. And they both needed something to distract themselves after the first few desperate hours of trying and failing to fix what had been so royally screwed up.

With Pandora and the Hidden One dead, Danny and Sophie could look after things back at home.

And they had the Horseman of Death too. Somehow, through mutual loss and warfare, he'd seemed to gain some sort of respect for the Mills sisters.

At least, that's what Abbie hoped his headless nod had been about when he obeyed her order to leave and disappear into the mist as quickly as his creepy horse.

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There's never really a good way for someone to find out about the supernatural.

It's always a gut-wrenching moment of disbelief, like missing a step, falling down the staircase, and hitting every additional step on the way down, along with a cat, who let's out an unholy screech that races up your considerably bruised spine.

If you're lucky it's over quick, and there are people around to answer your questions afterward. If your not then you end up alone and afraid for a long while like she and Jenny did.

From the sound of the terrified voice that answered her calls from the depths of an old root cellar, this had been the latter kind.

"Help! I'm _here_! Please!"

Abbie knelt and examined the hatch in the floor. several wooden 2x4's had been dragged across it, and nailed down, with the still active nail gun that sat plugged in nearby.

The house was being redone. It was a very old New England Style dwelling, with the floors caving in, and the paint peeling off. Wood and brick were scattered throughout it's yard. Besides the nail gun there were a myriad of other electric tools scattered around. And a car in the drive. You didn't just leave stuff like that sitting around so they had gone inside to investigate. This was the address listed for the first potential name, after all. Abbie wasn't about to go away without knowing for sure first.

"What is it about Crane's family that makes people want to bury them

alive?" Jenny asked.

"Shhh," Abbie fought back a smile while her mental Crane scoffed in outrage at Jenny's mockery.

She looked around and quickly located a (new and barely used claw hammer). Her sister quickly joined her with a crowbar.

There was a shout of alarm from below when the first of the nails came screeching out of the wood.

"It's okay," Abbie called down. "We're getting you out of there, just hold on!"

They tore through the barricade as quickly as they could. And when the last board was wrenched up Abbie opened up hatch.

It was a very small root cellar. Even she and Jenny would have had to crouch down to stop their heads scraping the ceiling.

The person they found inside was currently folded in on himself, grasping at the stone walls behind him.

Abbie took out her dad's lighter and flicked it on.

If she'd had any doubt before, that this was not the great great grandson of Ahitub Crane, and the last of the Crane bloodline, it died right there.

The poor kid looking back at her wasn't Ichabod. She hadn't really been expecting that. Not really. His face was fuller and rounder, less cheekbones and chin, with small ears, and dark, cropped hair. His eyes were so blown with fear and the dark she couldn't even see their color.

But his nose looked kinda too big for his face, like he still had to finish growing into it. And he scowled at with eyebrows that knit into a familiar knot.

He was shaking, and Abbie looked a second time, realizing that he really was young. Younger than Jenny or Joe, like beatercarcollegetuitionistillthink2amisalegitimatebedtime kind of young.

Age does not always define wisdom, the Crane in her head sniffed defensively. And she brushed the whole thing aside. reaching out for the kid and gesturing towards the open trap door.

"Come on. Let's get you out of here."

He shuffled forward despite the tremors that ran through him like an electric current. Abbie put a supporting hand on his back and gently propelled him up the stairs towards Jenny's waiting hand.

"Thank you!" he stammered, backing away from the dark pit and moving closer to the sunlight that spilled in through the open door. "Thank you. I didn't think anyone could hear me. I didn't know what to do. I thought you might be-"

He was white, and looked a bit wobbly on his feet. Jenny pushed him

into a chair and shoved one of her ever present energy bars into his hand. He practically swallowed it and gladly took the second one she offered him.

"How long have you been down there?" She asked him.

"What day _is it_?"

Jenny cursed

Abbie knelt beside the hatch and examined the floor around it. There was a lot of sawdust from the construction of the house. There were footsteps all over, and not all of them were theirs.

She stood back up. "You're name is Theodore Brannon?" She asked.

The young man nodded over his second energy bar. "Yes...Who are you? How did you know-"

"My name is Abbie Mills. I know you've been through an ordeal, but I need you to listen to me."

That wary scowl returned. This was no fool they were dealing with.

Good.

"I know that whatever put you into that hole wasn't normal," At least the strange tracks in the sawdust told her as much. "And I know you probably don't wanna tell us about it because we might think you're crazy. But you're in danger and we can't stay here."

His hand tightened around the energy bar until it was misshapen.

"You have to come with us until we can figure out whoever it is that's trying to get to you. They wouldn't have left you down there alive if you weren't important."

The kid's face had gone even whiter, if that were possible.

"This whole thing is impossible. I thought it was a dream."

Jenny jumped on this. "What dream?"

Theodore looked around sharply at her. "I...while I was..._down there_. I had a dream about a man. He told me things. A lot of things I don't understand, just like you. He-"

The kid hesitated.

"Listen," Abbie reassured. "Nothing you can say is gonna surprise me at this point, and it could be important."

He put the mangled remains of the energy bar into his lap, and burshed his hands off on his dusty pants. "He said I could trust you, if you did something."

Slowly, like it was the most ludicrous thing he'd ever done in his life, Theodore curled his hand into a fist and held it out, palm down

.

A warm feeling curled inside Abbie's chest as she made a fist of her own and smacked it against the kid's.

The voice inside her head seemed in that moment to be very smug indeed.

End
file.